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Decorative Fabrics of Distinction

STROHEIM & ROMANN
730 FIFTH AVENUE at 57th STREET
NEW YORK

CHICAGO ' BOSTON ' PHILADELPHIA
LOS ANGELES ' SAN FRANCISCO



A baroque floral scroll pattern.

THE word *baroque* is probably of Spanish or Portuguese origin, a *barrueco* being a large irregularly-shaped pearl. The term was first used only in connection with the jewelers' craft, but eventually it was applied indiscriminately to the architecture, painting, furniture, textiles and decorative accessories of that period or art style—not unlike an irregular pearl in its fantastic, florid and exaggerated manifestations—which followed closely upon the decline of the Renaissance. Italian writers imply in their use of the word *barocco* a certain decadence in taste, but it may also be employed to describe anything that is excessively extravagant and irregular.

THE extent of the baroque movement cannot be exactly fixed by means of dates nor can it be accurately termed a style or a period, although it is frequently

AFTER MICHELANGELO

very conveniently referred to as such. It had its origin in the latter part of the sixteenth century, attained its most complete expression in the seventeenth and continued to influence the art forms of the early eighteenth.

IT is to Michelangelo, the immortal painter, sculptor, architect and poet that we must turn if we wish to seek out the underlying impulses which resulted in the reaction against the pure and classic refinements of Renaissance art. For this great artist with his masterful knowledge of anatomy, of composition and of drawing, dared to disregard all laws in order to express more completely his artistic conceptions. Following in his footsteps, other artists with less genius and therefore less authority also broke away from accepted ideals and traditions and in so doing often lost themselves in meaningless, exaggerated details and contorted forms.

AFTER MICHELANGELO

IN architecture the term *baroque* is often applied with a not very exact meaning to the neoclassic style of the late Renaissance. The most famous exponents of the



French silk pattern of the period of Louis XIV.

AFTER MICHELANGELO

baroque influence in Italian architecture were Bernini, the last of the architects for St. Peter's in Rome, and Borromini, who was for a time his assistant. At the head of the movement in France was Jules Hardouin Mansart (or Mansard), who began the palace at Versailles for Louis XIV. This French king who was not in the habit of having his slightest request refused actually had to beg Bernini to come to Paris, and it was there in 1665 that the Italian architect, who was painter and sculptor as well, was visited by Sir Christopher Wren. The English architect "would have given his skin," as he said, to copy Bernini's designs for the rebuilding of the Louvre but consent was not forthcoming.

BESIDES exercising an utter disregard for the original and structural functions of classic forms and encouraging a strained originality of detail, baroque architecture was characterized by the use of sinuous frontages, huge scrolls, twisted

AFTER MICHELANGELO

columns and broken curves both in plan and elevation. Heavy gilding and sculptured figures in contorted attitudes were also prominently featured.

EVEN in the realm of textiles the baroque influence manifested itself in "sculpturesque" forms, sometimes heavy, oppressive, florid and bombastic, but at the same time extremely rich and varied and often very beautiful. The vase of flowers which had constituted the most important textile motif of the Renaissance repeated itself in countless patterns, but floral ornament became more naturalistic and not so flat in its handling. The general tendency was to enlarge the scale of the patterns and to outline them boldly against the background, at the same time breaking up the forms by a wealth of smaller detail. This charging of the larger leaves and flowers with smaller floral sprays was due probably to the prevalence of this type of ornament in the Ottoman silks which



Spanish brocade with oblique curving
baroque pattern. About 1700.

AFTER MICHELANGELO

were, in the seventeenth century, influencing the textile weaving art of all the Mediterranean countries. Aside from the flower-vase or jardinière patterns which appeared on baroque silks, large leaf and flower scrolls and medallions were much in evidence. The diagonal vine type of pattern also regained its popularity, especially in Spain, where the motifs became extremely fantastic and bold.

MANY of the silk patterns of the seventeenth century were not at all baroque in character, but the elaborate floral and conventional patterns of those which were, made them highly appreciated as wall hangings and furnishing fabrics throughout Europe at this time.

FRENCH silk weaving designs were closely allied with the baroque patterns of Italy until well into the seventeenth century. The real emancipation of the French school was, according to Cox,

AFTER MICHELANGELO

simultaneous with Simon Vouet's return from Italy. As court painter to Louis XIII, Vouet was in a position to exercise an important influence over the arts of France, which through his pupil Le Brun, who had been placed under his instruction when but eleven years old, was extended into the reign of Louis XIV. Under the influence of the French designers baroque textile patterns were subject to several changes. Especially French was the lace-like ornament introduced as a filling for the fruit, leaf and flower motifs in the designs. This use of lace meshes and other intricate details tended not only to confuse the ground and the pattern, but it also served eventually to divert the weavers from their velvet textures to lighter silken fabrics in which the smaller details could be rendered with more ease and precision.

THE Louis XIV art style was essentially baroque in character, emphatic, dazzling and sculpturesque. Silk patterns syn-

AFTER MICHELANGELO

chronized closely with other artistic manifestations, for all of the arts were closely coordinated under the genius of Le Brun. With Colbert he founded the Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648 and the Academy of France at Rome in 1666. In 1660 they established the Gobelins, which served as a school for the manufacture of tapestries and other furnishings for the royal palaces. Under the inspiration and guidance of these two vigorous personalities the *Fabrique* at Lyons rose to a position of supreme importance and authority.

IT has already been stated that the baroque influence continued into the early part of the eighteenth century. The *rococo* or rock and shell ornament of the Louis XV period was nothing more nor less than a further development of that free and untrammelled art movement which was first inaugurated by the great Michelangelo.



*17th century French velvet
with baroque design.*



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